

as to deferrals to findings of state agencies.

PART 1978—PROCEDURES FOR THE HANDLING OF RETALIATION COMPLAINTS UNDER THE EMPLOYEE PROTECTION PROVISION OF THE SURFACE TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1982

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Subpart A—Complaints, Investigations, Findings, and Preliminary Orders

§ 1978.100 Purpose and scope.

(a) This part implements the procedures of the employee protection (whistleblower) provision of the Surface

Transportation Assistance Act of 1982 (STAA), 49 U.S.C. 31105, as amended, which protects employees from retaliation because the employee has engaged in, or, in some circumstances is perceived to have engaged in, protected activity pertaining to commercial motor vehicle safety, health, or security matters.

(b) This part establishes procedures pursuant to the statutory provision set forth above for the expeditious handling of retaliation complaints filed by employees, or by persons acting on their behalf. These rules, together with those rules codified at 29 CFR part 18, set forth the procedures for submission of complaints, investigations, issuance of findings and preliminary orders, objections to findings, litigation before administrative law judges (ALJs), post-hearing administrative review, withdrawals and settlements, and judicial review and enforcement.

§ 1978.101 Definitions.

(a) *Act* means the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1982 (STAA), as amended.

(b) *Assistant Secretary* means the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health or the person or persons to whom he or she delegates authority under the Act.

(c) *Business days* means days other than Saturdays, Sundays, and Federal holidays.

(d) *Commercial motor carrier* means any person engaged in a business affecting commerce between States or between a State and a place outside thereof who owns or leases a commercial motor vehicle in connection with that business, or assigns employees to operate such a vehicle.

(e) *Commercial motor vehicle* means a self-propelled or towed vehicle used on the highways in commerce principally to transport passengers or cargo, if the vehicle:

(1) Has a gross vehicle weight rating or gross vehicle weight of at least 10,001 pounds, whichever is greater;

(2) Is designed to transport more than ten passengers including the driver; or

(3) Is used in transporting material found by the Secretary of Transportation to be hazardous under 49 U.S.C.

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5103 and transported in a quantity requiring placarding under regulations prescribed under 49 U.S.C. 5103.

(f) *Complainant* means the employee who filed a STAA whistleblower complaint or on whose behalf a complaint was filed.

(g) *Complaint*, for purposes of § 1978.102(b)(1) and § 1978.102(e)(1), includes both written and oral complaints to employers and/or government agencies.

(h) *Employee* means a driver of a commercial motor vehicle (including an independent contractor when personally operating a commercial motor vehicle), a mechanic, a freight handler, or an individual not an employer, who:

(1) Directly affects commercial motor vehicle safety or security in the course of employment by a commercial motor carrier; and

(2) Is not an employee of the United States Government, a State, or a political subdivision of a State acting in the course of employment.

(i) *Employer* means a person engaged in a business affecting commerce that owns or leases a commercial motor vehicle in connection with that business, or assigns an employee to operate the vehicle in commerce, but does not include the Government, a State, or a political subdivision of a State.

(j) *OSHA* means the Occupational Safety and Health Administration of the United States Department of Labor.

(k) *Person* means one or more individuals, partnerships, associations, corporations, business trusts, legal representatives or any other group of individuals.

(l) *Respondent* means the person alleged to have violated 49 U.S.C. 31105.

(m) *Secretary* means the Secretary of Labor or persons to whom authority under the Act has been delegated.

(n) *State* means a State of the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands.

(o) Any future statutory amendments that affect the definition of a term or terms listed in this section will apply in lieu of the definition stated herein.

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§ 1978.102 Obligations and prohibited acts.

(a) No person may discharge or otherwise retaliate against any employee with respect to the employee's compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment because the employee engaged in any of the activities specified in paragraphs (b) or (c) of this section. In addition, no person may discharge or otherwise retaliate against any employee with respect to the employee's compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment because a person acting pursuant to the employee's request engaged in any of the activities specified in paragraph (b) of this section.

(b) It is a violation for any employer to intimidate, threaten, restrain, coerce, blacklist, discharge, discipline, or in any other manner retaliate against any employee because the employee or a person acting pursuant to the employee's request has:

(1) Filed a complaint or begun a proceeding related to a violation of a commercial motor vehicle safety or security regulation, standard, or order; or

(2) Testified or will testify at any proceeding related to a violation of a commercial motor vehicle safety or security regulation, standard, or order.

(c) It is a violation for any employer to intimidate, threaten, restrain, coerce, blacklist, discharge, discipline, or in any other manner retaliate against any employee because the employee:

(1) Refuses to operate a vehicle because:

(i) The operation violates a regulation, standard, or order of the United States related to commercial motor vehicle safety, health, or security; or

(ii) He or she has a reasonable apprehension of serious injury to himself or herself or the public because of the vehicle's hazardous safety or security condition;

(2) Accurately reports hours on duty pursuant to Chapter 315 of Title 49 of the United States Code; or

(3) Cooperates with a safety or security investigation by the Secretary of Transportation, the Secretary of Homeland Security, or the National Transportation Safety Board; or

(4) Furnishes information to the Secretary of Transportation, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the National Transportation Safety Board, or any Federal, State, or local regulatory or law enforcement agency as to the facts relating to any accident or incident resulting in injury or death to an individual or damage to property occurring in connection with commercial motor vehicle transportation.

(d) No person may discharge or otherwise retaliate against any employee with respect to the employee's compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment because the person perceives that the employee has engaged in any of the activities specified in paragraph (e) of this section.

(e) It is a violation for any employer to intimidate, threaten, restrain, coerce, blacklist, discharge, discipline, or in any other manner retaliate against any employee because the employer perceives that:

(1) The employee has filed or is about to file a complaint or has begun or is about to begin a proceeding related to a violation of a commercial motor vehicle safety or security regulation, standard or order;

(2) The employee is about to cooperate with a safety or security investigation by the Secretary of Transportation, the Secretary of Homeland Security, or the National Transportation Safety Board; or

(3) The employee has furnished or is about to furnish information to the Secretary of Transportation, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the National Transportation Safety Board, or any Federal, State, or local regulatory or law enforcement agency as to the facts relating to any accident or incident resulting in injury or death to an individual or damage to property occurring in connection with commercial motor vehicle transportation.

(f) For purposes of this section, an employee's apprehension of serious injury is reasonable only if a reasonable individual in the circumstances then confronting the employee would conclude that the hazardous safety or security condition establishes a real danger of accident, injury or serious impairment to health. To qualify for protection, the employee must have

sought from the employer, and been unable to obtain, correction of the hazardous safety or security conditions.

§ 1978.103 Filing of retaliation complaints.

(a) *Who may file.* An employee who believes that he or she has been retaliated against by an employer in violation of STAA may file, or have filed by any person on the employee's behalf, a complaint alleging such retaliation.

(b) *Nature of Filing.* No particular form of complaint is required. A complaint may be filed orally or in writing. Oral complaints will be reduced to writing by OSHA. If an employee is unable to file a complaint in English, OSHA will accept the complaint in any language.

(c) *Place of Filing.* The complaint should be filed with the OSHA Area Director responsible for enforcement activities in the geographical area where the employee resides or was employed, but may be filed with any OSHA officer or employee. Addresses and telephone numbers for these officials are set forth in local directories and at the following Internet address: <http://www.osha.gov>.

(d) *Time for Filing.* Within 180 days after an alleged violation occurs, an employee who believes that he or she has been retaliated against in violation of STAA may file, or have filed by any person on his or her behalf, a complaint alleging such retaliation. The date of the postmark, facsimile transmittal, e-mail communication, telephone call, hand-delivery, delivery to a third-party commercial carrier, or in-person filing at an OSHA office will be considered the date of filing. The time for filing a complaint may be tolled for reasons warranted by applicable case law.

(e) *Relationship to Section 11(c) complaints.* A complaint filed under STAA alleging facts that would also constitute a violation of Section 11(c) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, 29 U.S.C. 660(c), will be deemed to be a complaint under both STAA and Section 11(c). Similarly, a complaint filed under Section 11(c) that alleges facts that would also constitute a violation of STAA will be deemed to be a complaint filed under both STAA and

Section 11(c). Normal procedures and timeliness requirements under the respective statutes and regulations will be followed.

§ 1978.104 Investigation.

(a) Upon receipt of a complaint in the investigating office, the Assistant Secretary will notify the respondent of the filing of the complaint by providing the respondent (or the respondent's legal counsel if respondent is represented by counsel) with a copy of the complaint, redacted in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. 552a, *et seq.*, and other applicable confidentiality laws. The Assistant Secretary will also notify the respondent (or the respondent's legal counsel if respondent is represented by counsel) of the respondent's rights under paragraphs (b) and (f) of this section. The Assistant Secretary will provide a copy of the unredacted complaint to the complainant (or complainant's legal counsel, if complainant is represented by counsel) and to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

(b) Within 20 days of receipt of the notice of the filing of the complaint provided under paragraph (a) of this section, the respondent may submit to the Assistant Secretary a written statement and any affidavits or documents substantiating its position. Within the same 20 days, the respondent may request a meeting with the Assistant Secretary to present its position.

(c) Throughout the investigation, the agency will provide to the complainant (or the complainant's legal counsel if complainant is represented by counsel) a copy of all of respondent's submissions to the agency that are responsive to the complainant's whistleblower complaint. Before providing such materials to the complainant, the agency will redact them in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. 552a, *et seq.*, and other applicable confidentiality laws.

(d) Investigations will be conducted in a manner that protects the confidentiality of any person who provides information on a confidential basis, other than the complainant, in accordance with part 70 of title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

(e)(1) A complaint of alleged violation will be dismissed unless the complainant has made a prima facie showing that protected activity or, in circumstances covered by the Act, a perception of protected activity was a contributing factor in the adverse action alleged in the complaint.

(2) The complaint, supplemented as appropriate by interviews of the complainant, must allege the existence of facts and evidence to make a prima facie showing as follows:

(i) The employee engaged in a protected activity or, in circumstances covered by the Act, was perceived to have engaged in a protected activity;

(ii) The respondent knew or suspected, actually or constructively, that the employee engaged in the protected activity, or, in circumstances covered by the Act, perceived the employee to have engaged in the protected activity;

(iii) The employee suffered an adverse action; and

(iv) The circumstances were sufficient to raise the inference that the protected activity or, in circumstances covered by the Act, the perception of protected activity, was a contributing factor in the adverse action.

(3) For purposes of determining whether to investigate, the complainant will be considered to have met the required burden if the complaint on its face, supplemented as appropriate through interviews of the complainant, alleges the existence of facts and either direct or circumstantial evidence to meet the required showing, *i.e.*, to give rise to an inference that the respondent knew or suspected that the employee engaged in protected activity (or, in circumstances covered by the Act, perceived the employee to have engaged in protected activity) and that the protected activity (or the perception thereof) was a contributing factor in the adverse action. The burden may be satisfied, for example, if the complainant shows that the adverse action took place shortly after the protected activity, giving rise to the inference that it was a contributing factor in the adverse action. If the required showing has not been made, the complainant (or the complainant's legal counsel if complainant is represented by counsel) will

be so notified and the investigation will not commence.

(4) Notwithstanding a finding that a complainant has made a prima facie showing, as required by this section, an investigation of the complaint will not be conducted or will be discontinued if the respondent, pursuant to the procedures provided in this paragraph, demonstrates by clear and convincing evidence that it would have taken the same adverse action in the absence of the complainant's protected activity or, when applicable, the perception thereof.

(5) If the respondent fails to make a timely response or fails to satisfy the burden set forth in the prior paragraph, the Assistant Secretary will proceed with the investigation. The investigation will proceed whenever it is necessary or appropriate to confirm or verify the information provided by the respondent.

(f) Prior to the issuance of findings and a preliminary order as provided for in § 1978.105, if the Assistant Secretary has reasonable cause, on the basis of information gathered under the procedures of this part, to believe that the respondent has violated the Act and that preliminary reinstatement is warranted, the Assistant Secretary will again contact the respondent (or the respondent's legal counsel if respondent is represented by counsel) to give notice of the substance of the relevant evidence supporting the complainant's allegations as developed during the course of the investigation. This evidence includes any witness statements, which will be redacted to protect the identity of confidential informants where statements were given in confidence; if the statements cannot be redacted without revealing the identity of confidential informants, summaries of their contents will be provided. The respondent will be given the opportunity to submit a written response, to meet with the investigators, to present statements from witnesses in support of its position, and to present legal and factual arguments. The respondent must present this evidence within ten business days of the Assistant Secretary's notification pursuant to this paragraph, or as soon thereafter as the Assistant Secretary and the respondent

can agree, if the interests of justice so require.

§ 1978.105 Issuance of findings and preliminary orders.

(a) After considering all the relevant information collected during the investigation, the Assistant Secretary will issue, within 60 days of the filing of the complaint, written findings as to whether there is reasonable cause to believe that the respondent retaliated against the complainant in violation of STAA.

(1) If the Assistant Secretary concludes that there is reasonable cause to believe that a violation has occurred, he or she will accompany the findings with a preliminary order providing the relief prescribed in 49 U.S.C. 31105(b)(3). Such order will include, where appropriate, a requirement that the respondent abate the violation; reinstatement of the complainant to his or her former position, together with the compensation, terms, conditions and privileges of the complainant's employment; payment of compensatory damages (backpay with interest and compensation for any special damages sustained as a result of the retaliation, including any litigation costs, expert witness fees, and reasonable attorney fees which the complainant has incurred); and payment of punitive damages up to \$250,000.

(2) If the Assistant Secretary concludes that a violation has not occurred, the Assistant Secretary will notify the parties of that finding.

(b) The findings and the preliminary order will be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, to all parties of record (and each party's legal counsel if the party is represented by counsel). The findings and preliminary order will inform the parties of the right to object to the findings and/or the preliminary order and to request a hearing. The findings and preliminary order also will give the address of the Chief Administrative Law Judge. At the same time, the Assistant Secretary will file with the Chief Administrative Law Judge, U.S. Department of Labor, a copy of the complaint and a copy of the findings and/or order.

(c) The findings and the preliminary order will be effective 30 days after receipt by the respondent (or the respondent's legal counsel if the respondent is represented by counsel), or on the compliance date set forth in the preliminary order, whichever is later, unless an objection and/or request for a hearing has been timely filed as provided at § 1978.106. However, the portion of any preliminary order requiring reinstatement will be effective immediately upon the respondent's receipt of the findings and preliminary order, regardless of any objections to the findings and/or order.

Subpart B—Litigation

§ 1978.106 Objections to the findings and the preliminary order and request for a hearing.

(a) Any party who desires review, including judicial review, of the findings and preliminary order must file any objections and/or a request for a hearing on the record within 30 days of receipt of the findings and preliminary order pursuant to § 1978.105. The objections and request for a hearing must be in writing and state whether the objections are to the findings and/or the preliminary order. The date of the postmark, facsimile transmittal, or e-mail communication will be considered to be the date of filing; if the objection is filed in person, by hand-delivery or other means, the objection is filed upon receipt. Objections will be filed with the Chief Administrative Law Judge, U.S. Department of Labor (800 K Street, NW., Washington, DC 20001), and copies of the objections must be mailed at the same time to the other parties of record, the OSHA official who issued the findings and order, the Assistant Secretary, and the Associate Solicitor for Occupational Safety and Health.

(b) If a timely objection is filed, all provisions of the preliminary order will be stayed, except for the portion requiring preliminary reinstatement, which will not be automatically stayed. The portion of the preliminary order requiring reinstatement will be effective immediately upon the respondent's receipt of the findings and preliminary order, regardless of any

objections to the order. The respondent may file a motion with the Office of Administrative Law Judges for a stay of the preliminary order of reinstatement. If no timely objection is filed with respect to either the findings or the preliminary order, the findings and preliminary order will become the final decision of the Secretary, not subject to judicial review.

§ 1978.107 Hearings.

(a) Except as provided in this part, proceedings will be conducted in accordance with the rules of practice and procedure and the rules of evidence for administrative hearings before the Office of Administrative Law Judges, codified at part 18 of title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

(b) Upon receipt of an objection and request for hearing, the Chief Administrative Law Judge will promptly assign the case to an ALJ who will notify the parties, by certified mail, of the day, time, and place of hearing. The hearing is to commence expeditiously, except upon a showing of good cause or unless otherwise agreed to by the parties. Hearings will be conducted *de novo* and on the record.

(c) If both the complainant and the respondent object to the findings and/or order, the objections will be consolidated, and a single hearing will be conducted.

§ 1978.108 Role of Federal agencies.

(a) (1) The complainant and the respondent will be parties in every proceeding. In any case in which the respondent objects to the findings or the preliminary order the Assistant Secretary ordinarily will be the prosecuting party. In any other cases, at the Assistant Secretary's discretion, the Assistant Secretary may participate as a party or participate as *amicus curiae* at any stage of the proceeding. This right to participate includes, but is not limited to, the right to petition for review of a decision of an ALJ, including a decision approving or rejecting a settlement agreement between the complainant and the respondent.

(2) If the Assistant Secretary assumes the role of prosecuting party in accordance with paragraph (a)(1) of

this section, he or she may, upon written notice to the appropriate adjudicatory body and the other parties, withdraw as the prosecuting party in the exercise of prosecutorial discretion. If the Assistant Secretary withdraws, the complainant will become the prosecuting party and the ALJ will issue appropriate orders to regulate the course of future proceedings.

(3) Copies of documents in all cases, whether or not the Assistant Secretary is participating in the proceeding, must be sent to the Assistant Secretary, as well as all other parties. In all cases in which the Assistant Secretary is participating in the proceeding, copies of documents must also be sent to the Associate Solicitor for Occupational Safety and Health.

(b) The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, if interested in a proceeding, may participate as *amicus curiae* at any time in the proceeding, at its discretion. At the request of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, copies of all pleadings in a case must be sent to that agency, whether or not that agency is participating in the proceeding.

§ 1978.109 Decision and orders of the administrative law judge.

(a) The decision of the ALJ will contain appropriate findings, conclusions, and an order pertaining to the remedies provided in paragraph (d) of this section, as appropriate. A determination that a violation has occurred may only be made if the complainant has demonstrated by a preponderance of the evidence that the protected activity, or, in circumstances covered by the Act, the perception of protected activity, was a contributing factor in the adverse action alleged in the complaint.

(b) If the complainant or the Assistant Secretary has satisfied the burden set forth in the prior paragraph, relief may not be ordered if the respondent demonstrates by clear and convincing evidence that it would have taken the same adverse action in the absence of any protected activity or the perception thereof.

(c) Neither the Assistant Secretary's determination to dismiss a complaint without completing an investigation

pursuant to § 1978.104(e) nor the Assistant Secretary's determination to proceed with an investigation is subject to review by the ALJ, and a complaint may not be remanded for the completion of an investigation or for additional findings on the basis that a determination to dismiss was made in error. Rather, if there otherwise is jurisdiction, the ALJ will hear the case on the merits or dispose of the matter without a hearing if the facts and circumstances warrant.

(d)(1) If the ALJ concludes that the respondent has violated the law, the order must order the respondent to take appropriate affirmative action to abate the violation, including, where appropriate, reinstatement of the complainant to his or her former position, together with the compensation, terms, conditions, and privileges of the complainant's employment; payment of compensatory damages (backpay with interest and compensation for any special damages sustained as a result of the retaliation, including any litigation costs, expert witness fees, and reasonable attorney fees which the complainant may have incurred); and payment of punitive damages up to \$250,000.

(2) If the ALJ determines that the respondent has not violated the law, an order will be issued denying the complaint.

(e) The decision will be served upon all parties to the proceeding, the Assistant Secretary, and the Associate Solicitor for Occupational Safety and Health. Any ALJ's decision requiring reinstatement or lifting an order of reinstatement by the Assistant Secretary will be effective immediately upon receipt of the decision by the respondent. For ALJ decisions issued on or after the effective date of these rules, all other portions of the ALJ's order will be effective ten business days after the date of the decision unless a timely petition for review has been filed with the Administrative Review Board (ARB).

§ 1978.110 Decision and orders of the Administrative Review Board.

(a) The Assistant Secretary or any other party desiring to seek review, including judicial review, of a decision of

the ALJ must file a written petition for review with the ARB, U.S. Department of Labor (200 Constitution Ave., NW., Washington, DC 20210), to which the Secretary has delegated the authority to act and issue final decisions under this part. Any ALJ decision issued on or after the effective date of these rules will become the final order of the Secretary unless, pursuant to this section, a timely petition for review is filed with the ARB and the ARB accepts the decision for review. The parties should identify in their petitions for review the legal conclusions or orders to which they object, or the objections will ordinarily be deemed waived. A petition must be filed within ten business days of the date of the decision of the ALJ. The date of the postmark, facsimile transmittal, or e-mail communication will be considered to be the date of filing; if the petition is filed in person, by hand-delivery or other means, the petition is considered filed upon receipt. The petition must be served on all parties and on the Chief Administrative Law Judge at the time it is filed with the ARB. Copies of the petition for review and all briefs must be served on the Assistant Secretary and, in cases in which the Assistant Secretary is a party, on the Associate Solicitor for Occupational Safety and Health.

(b) If a timely petition for review is filed pursuant to paragraph (a) of this section, the decision of the ALJ will become the final order of the Secretary 30 days after the filing of the petition unless the ARB, within that time, issues an order notifying the parties that the case has been accepted for review. If a case is accepted for review, the decision of the ALJ will be inoperative unless and until the ARB issues an order adopting the decision, except that an order of reinstatement will be effective while review is conducted by the ARB unless the ARB grants a motion by the respondent to stay that order based on exceptional circumstances. The ARB will specify the terms under which any briefs are to be filed. The ARB will review the factual determinations of the ALJ under the substantial evidence standard. If no timely petition for review is filed, or the ARB denies review, the decision of

the ALJ will become the final order of the Secretary. If no timely petition for review is filed, the resulting final order is not subject to judicial review.

(c) The final decision of the ARB will be issued within 120 days of the conclusion of the hearing, which will be deemed to be ten business days after the date of the decision of the ALJ, unless a motion for reconsideration has been filed with the ALJ in the interim, in which case the conclusion of the hearing is the date the motion for reconsideration is denied or ten business days after a new decision is issued. The ARB's final decision will be served upon all parties and the Chief Administrative Law Judge by mail. The final decision also will be served on the Assistant Secretary and on the Associate Solicitor for Occupational Safety and Health, even if the Assistant Secretary is not a party.

(d) If the ARB concludes that the respondent has violated the law, the final order will order the respondent to take appropriate affirmative action to abate the violation, including, where appropriate, reinstatement of the complainant to his or her former position, together with the compensation, terms, conditions, and privileges of the complainant's employment; payment of compensatory damages (backpay with interest and compensation for any special damages sustained as a result of the retaliation, including any litigation costs, expert witness fees, and reasonable attorney fees the complainant may have incurred); and payment of punitive damages up to \$250,000.

(e) If the ARB determines that the respondent has not violated the law, an order will be issued denying the complaint.

(f) Paragraphs (a) and (b) of this section apply to all cases in which the decision of the ALJ is issued on or after the effective date of these regulations.

Subpart C—Miscellaneous Provisions

§ 1978.111 Withdrawal of STAA complaints, objections, and petitions for review; settlement.

(a) At any time prior to the filing of objections to the Assistant Secretary's findings and/or preliminary order, a

complainant may withdraw his or her STAA complaint by filing a written withdrawal with the Assistant Secretary. The Assistant Secretary then will determine whether to approve the withdrawal. The Assistant Secretary will notify the respondent (or the respondent's legal counsel if respondent is represented by counsel) of the approval of any withdrawal. If the complaint is withdrawn because of settlement, the settlement must be submitted for approval in accordance with paragraph (d) of this section. After the filing of objections to the Assistant Secretary's findings and/or preliminary order, the complainant may not withdraw his or her complaint.

(b) The Assistant Secretary may withdraw his or her findings and/or a preliminary order at any time before the expiration of the 30-day objection period described in § 1978.106, provided that no objection yet has been filed, and substitute new findings and/or a preliminary order. The date of the receipt of the substituted findings and/or order will begin a new 30-day objection period.

(c) At any time before the Assistant Secretary's findings and preliminary order become final, a party may withdraw its objections to the Assistant Secretary's findings and/or preliminary order by filing a written withdrawal with the ALJ. If a case is on review with the ARB, a party may withdraw its petition for review of an ALJ's decision at any time before that decision becomes final by filing a written withdrawal with the ARB. The ALJ or the ARB, as the case may be, will determine whether to approve the withdrawal of the objections or the petition for review. If the ALJ approves a request to withdraw objections to the Assistant Secretary's findings and/or preliminary order, and there are no other pending objections, the Assistant Secretary's findings and preliminary order will become the final order of the Secretary. If the ARB approves a request to withdraw a petition for review of an ALJ decision, and there are no other pending petitions for review of that decision, the ALJ's decision will become the final order of the Secretary. If objections or a petition for review are withdrawn because of settlement, the

settlement must be submitted for approval in accordance with paragraph (d) of this section.

(d)(1) *Investigative settlements.* At any time after the filing of a STAA complaint and before the findings and/or order are objected to or become a final order by operation of law, the case may be settled if the Assistant Secretary, the complainant, and the respondent agree to a settlement. The Assistant Secretary's approval of a settlement reached by the respondent and the complainant demonstrates his or her consent and achieves the consent of all three parties.

(2) *Adjudicatory settlements.* At any time after the filing of objections to the Assistant Secretary's findings and/or order, the case may be settled if the participating parties agree to a settlement and the settlement is approved by the ALJ if the case is before the ALJ or by the ARB, if the ARB has accepted the case for review. A copy of the settlement will be filed with the ALJ or the ARB as the case may be.

(3) If, under paragraph (d)(1) or (d)(2) of this section, the respondent makes an offer to settle the case which the Assistant Secretary, when acting as the prosecuting party, deems to be a fair and equitable settlement of all matters at issue and the complainant refuses to accept the offer, the Assistant Secretary may decline to assume the role of prosecuting party. In such circumstances, the Assistant Secretary will immediately notify the complainant (or the complainant's legal counsel if complainant is represented by counsel) that review of the settlement offer may cause the Assistant Secretary to decline the role of prosecuting party. After the Assistant Secretary has reviewed the offer and when he or she has decided to decline the role of prosecuting party, the Assistant Secretary will immediately notify all parties of his or her decision in writing and, if the case is before the ALJ or the ARB, a copy of the notice will be sent to the appropriate official in accordance with § 1978.108(a)(2).

(e) Any settlement approved by the Assistant Secretary, the ALJ, or the ARB will constitute the final order of the Secretary and may be enforced pursuant to § 1978.113.

§ 1978.112

§ 1978.112 Judicial review.

(a) Within 60 days after the issuance of a final order under §§1978.109 and 1978.110, any person adversely affected or aggrieved by such order may file a petition for review of the order in the United States Court of Appeals for the circuit in which the violation allegedly occurred or the circuit in which the person resided on the date of the violation.

(b) A final order of the ARB will not be subject to judicial review in any criminal or other civil proceeding.

(c) If a timely petition for review is filed, the record of a case, including the record of proceedings before the ALJ, will be transmitted by the ARB to the appropriate court pursuant to the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure and the local rules of such court.

§ 1978.113 Judicial enforcement.

Whenever any person has failed to comply with a preliminary order of reinstatement or a final order, including one approving a settlement agreement as provided in §1978.111, the Secretary may file a civil action seeking enforcement of the order in the United States district court for the district in which the violation was found to have occurred.

§ 1978.114 District court jurisdiction of retaliation complaints under STAA.

(a) If there is no final order of the Secretary, 210 days have passed since the filing of the complaint, and there is no showing that there has been delay due to the bad faith of the complainant, the complainant may bring an action at law or equity for *de novo* review in the appropriate district court of the United States, which will have jurisdiction over such an action without regard to the amount in controversy.

(b) Fifteen days in advance of filing a complaint in federal court, a complainant must file with the Assistant Secretary, the ALJ, or the ARB, depending upon where the proceeding is pending, a notice of his or her intention to file such complaint. The notice must be served on all parties to the proceeding. A copy of the notice must be served on OSHA's Regional Administrator, the Assistant Secretary, and the Associate Solicitor for Occupational Safety and

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Health. The complainant must file and serve a copy of the district court complaint on the above as soon as possible after the district court complaint has been filed with the court.

§ 1978.115 Special circumstances; waiver of rules.

In special circumstances not contemplated by the provisions of these rules, or for good cause shown, the ALJ or the ARB on review may, upon application, after three days notice to all parties, waive any rule or issue such orders as justice or the administration of STAA requires.

PART 1979—PROCEDURES FOR THE HANDLING OF DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS UNDER SECTION 519 OF THE WENDELL H. FORD AVIATION INVESTMENT AND REFORM ACT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Subpart A—Complaints, Investigations, Findings and Preliminary Orders

Sec.

- 1979.100 Purpose and scope.
- 1979.101 Definitions.
- 1979.102 Obligations and prohibited acts.
- 1979.103 Filing of discrimination complaint.
- 1979.104 Investigation.
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Subpart B—Litigation

- 1979.106 Objections to the findings and the preliminary order and request for a hearing.
- 1979.107 Hearings.
- 1979.108 Role of Federal agencies.
- 1979.109 Decision and orders of the administrative law judge.
- 1979.110 Decision and orders of the Administrative Review Board.

Subpart C—Miscellaneous Provisions

- 1979.111 Withdrawal of complaints, objections, and findings; settlement.
- 1979.112 Judicial review.
- 1979.113 Judicial enforcement.
- 1979.114 Special circumstances; waiver of rules.

AUTHORITY: 49 U.S.C. 42121; Secretary of Labor's Order 5-2002, 67 FR 65008 (October 22, 2002).

SOURCE: 68 FR 14107, Mar. 21, 2003, unless otherwise noted.